

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
February 6 - 12, 2014

1. [U.S. Intelligence Leaders Outline Security Threats](#) (02-12-2014)
2. [Locklear Kicks Off 33rd Cobra Gold Exercise in Thailand](#) (02-11-2014)
3. [Obama, Hollande on Renewed French-U.S. Alliance](#) (02-10-2014)
4. [Moroccan and U.S. Navy Ships Exercise Together](#) (02-10-2014)
5. [Hagel, Foreign Minister Discuss U.S.-Japan Alliance](#) (02-08-2014)
6. [U.S. Continues to Plan for Post-2014 Afghan Mission, Hagel Says](#) (02-07-2014)
7. [Kerry Encourages Faith-Based Efforts for Middle East Peace](#) (02-06-2014)
8. [Ambassador Power at U.N. on Syria](#) (02-06-2014)

1. U.S. Intelligence Leaders Outline Security Threats (02-12-2014)

By Sonya Weakley
Staff Writer

Washington — Cyber attacks, isolated ground attacks, ongoing regional conflicts and organized crime are among the major threats to the long- and short-term security of the United States and the rest of the world.

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee on February 11, James Clapper, U.S. national intelligence director, and Army Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said increasingly diverse formal and informal terrorist networks constitute major sources of foreign and domestic destabilization.

Such groups — numbering in the thousands — have taken advantage of the unprecedented violence in Syria, constituting a threat to both the United States and Europe. Both men indicated the spread of violence into neighboring countries, including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, threatens to prolong the conflict.

Calling the humanitarian situation in Syria an "apocalyptic disaster," Clapper added that the estimated 7,500 foreign fighters in Syria, from as many as 50 countries, pose a significant security challenge.

He said the capability of established terrorist organizations, including al-Qaida, to conduct large-scale U.S. attacks has been significantly degraded, but the group remains a threat, particularly as it reorganizes in other areas, including North Africa.

While Iran's foreign policies contribute to regional destabilization, Clapper and Flynn agreed that long-standing sanctions, resulting in major economic consequences, have motivated the country's leaders to make concessions. Clapper said U.S. intelligence organizations have the capability to monitor compliance.

He said new sanctions against Iran would be "counterproductive" to ongoing multilateral talks aimed at convincing Tehran to give up its nuclear weapons program.

Flynn said uncertainty over Afghanistan's post-2014 security environment will likely drive decisions at all levels next year, while the country's security forces work to improve their already noted progress in conducting and sustaining security operations.

The United States has been urging Afghan President Hamid Karzai to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement overwhelmingly approved by an Afghan Loya Jira in November 2013 to allow a small number of U.S. troops to remain in support roles after 2014. Clapper said he now expects the agreement will not be signed prior to the April presidential election. "The effect already of the delay has been negative in terms of the impact on the economy, not to mention, I think, the psychological impact," he said.

Under intensive questioning regarding internal and external threats to U.S. domestic and foreign intelligence operations, Flynn said major revisions to internal data-access processes are being instituted across all U.S. intelligence agencies. At the same time, efforts are being made to increase the transparency of intelligence-gathering objectives to allay privacy concerns.

Both men outlined major security concerns from all parts of the world. Combining the efforts of civilian and defense intelligence are key to maintaining national and international security.

"Our assessments are based upon ... worldwide human intelligence, technical intelligence, counterintelligence, and document and media exploitation capabilities, along with information from partners in the intelligence community and the entire ... intelligence enterprise, international allies and open sources," Flynn said.

2. Locklear Kicks Off 33rd Cobra Gold Exercise in Thailand (02-11-2014)

By Terri Moon Cronk
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 11, 2014 – In a ceremony at Camp Akatosarot in Thailand today, Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, commander of U.S. Pacific Command, kicked off the 33rd iteration of Exercise Cobra Gold.

Cobra Gold 14 is designed to advance regional security and provide effective response to regional crises through a multinational force from nations that share common goals and security commitments in the Asia-Pacific region, officials said.

Noting that Thailand is the oldest U.S. ally in the region – the U.S.-Thai alliance is entering its 181st year -- Locklear called Cobra Gold the Pacific's signature exercise and one of the largest and most important multilateral exercises in which the United States participates.

In 2012, U.S. and Thai defense leaders signed a joint vision statement to update the defense relationship between the two nations, which expanded the nations' regional partnership to focus on challenges that include disaster relief and other global security contributions, Locklear said.

"Events like Cobra Gold allow us to work together multilaterally to exercise those commitments," he added. "Since 1980, Cobra Gold has served to develop, better respect and understand all the participants. This 33rd annual event, with over 13,000 participants, is no different."

But Cobra Gold 14 is more than just the United States and Thai forces, as myriad nations are represented in the exercise, he noted. "Whether you are a participant or an observer, whether you have been here from the beginning or this is your nation's first Cobra Gold, your presence here demonstrates your country's resolve to support peace and stability in the region," Locklear told the kick-off ceremony's audience.

This year's exercise "will prepare us for a whole spectrum of challenges," from field exercises and live firing events, the admiral said. Humanitarian civic assistance projects also are important to the event, he added.

"Cobra Gold truly replicates the dynamic security environment we find ourselves in today, and what we will face in the future," Locklear said. "We must continue to build on the rich history of cooperation that events like Cobra Gold provide for us."

Aspiring to work closely with all nations in the region to confront common challenges and continue peace and prosperity is critical, he added.

"Together, we can build a common view on security interests," he said, adding that through such bilateral and multilateral engagements, participating nations will improve and share understanding, and enhance trust.

"I look forward to the opportunity when we can continue to work together to solve problems that each of our nations face," the Pacom commander said, "and toward a brighter future for the entire region for ourselves, our children, and their children."

Biographies:

[Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III](#)

Related Articles:

[Locklear: U.S. Must Remain 'Out and About' to Succeed in Pacific](#) (02-06-2014)

Related Sites:

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[3. Obama, Hollande on Renewed French-U.S. Alliance \(02-10-2014\)](#)

The following commentary by President Obama and French President François Hollande was published in the Washington Post and Le Monde on February 10. There are no republication restrictions.

Obama and Hollande: France and the U.S. enjoy a renewed alliance
By Barack Obama and François Hollande

Today, American and French diplomats are preparing for talks with Iran that build on the agreement that has halted progress on and rolled back key elements of the Iranian nuclear program. French and American officials share information daily to combat terrorism around the world. Our development experts are helping farmers across Africa and on other continents boost their yields and escape poverty. In forums such as the Group of Eight and the Group of 20, the United States and France promote strong, sustainable and balanced growth, jobs and stability — and we address global challenges that no country can tackle alone. At high-tech start-ups in Paris and Silicon Valley, American and French entrepreneurs are collaborating on the innovations that power our global economy.

A decade ago, few would have imagined our two countries working so closely together in so many ways. But in recent years our alliance has transformed. Since France's return to NATO's military command four years ago and consistent with our continuing commitment to strengthen the NATO-European Union partnership, we have expanded our cooperation across the board. We are sovereign and independent nations that make our decisions based on our respective national interests. Yet we have been able to take our alliance to a new level because our interests and values are so closely aligned.

Rooted in a friendship stretching back more than two centuries, our deepening partnership offers a model for international cooperation. Transnational challenges cannot be met by any one nation alone. More nations must step forward and share the burden and costs of leadership. More nations must meet their responsibilities for upholding global security and peace and advancing freedom and human rights.

Building on the first-step agreement with Iran, we are united with our "P5+1" partners — Britain, Germany, Russia and China — and the E.U. and will meet next week in Vienna to begin discussions aimed at achieving a comprehensive solution that prevents Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. In Syria, our credible threat of force paved the way for the plan to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons; now, Syria must meet its obligations. With the Syrian civil war threatening the stability of the region, including Lebanon, the international community must step up its efforts to care for the Syrian people, strengthen the moderate Syrian opposition, and work through the Geneva II process toward a political transition that delivers the Syrian people from dictatorship and terrorism.

Perhaps nowhere is our new partnership on more vivid display than in Africa. In Mali, French and African Union forces — with U.S. logistical and information support — have pushed back al-Qaeda-linked insurgents, allowing the people of Mali to pursue a democratic future. Across the Sahel, we are partnering with countries to prevent al-Qaeda from gaining new footholds. In the Central African Republic, French and African Union soldiers — backed by American airlift and support — are working to stem violence and create space for dialogue, reconciliation and swift progress to transitional elections.

Across the continent, from Senegal to Somalia, we are helping train and equip local forces so they can take responsibility for their own security. We are partnering with governments and citizens who want to strengthen democratic institutions, improve agriculture and alleviate hunger, expand access to electricity and deliver the treatment that saves lives from infectious diseases. Our two countries

were the earliest and are among the strongest champions of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Alongside a revitalized alliance on the world stage, we're also working to deepen our bilateral economic relationship. Already, France is one of America's top export markets, and the United States is the largest customer for French goods outside the European Union — trade that supports nearly a million jobs in our two countries. Our cooperation in science and education is illustrated by existing partnerships between our universities, top research laboratories and space agencies. But as entrepreneurial societies that cherish the spirit of invention and creativity, we need to do more to lead the world in innovation.

The trade and investment partnership that we are pursuing between the European Union and the United States is a major opportunity to build on millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic already supported by U.S.-E.U. trade. Such an agreement would result in more trade, more jobs and more export opportunities, including for small businesses in both of our countries. It would also build a lasting foundation for our efforts to promote growth and the global economic recovery.

This includes our leadership to combat climate change. Even as our two nations reduce our own carbon emissions, we can expand the clean energy partnerships that create jobs and move us toward low-carbon growth. We can do more to help developing countries shift to low-carbon energy as well, and deal with rising seas and more intense storms. As we work toward next year's climate conference in Paris, we continue to urge all nations to join us in pursuit of an ambitious and inclusive global agreement that reduces greenhouse gas emissions through concrete actions. The climate summit organized by the U.N. secretary general this September will give us the opportunity to reaffirm our ambitions for the climate conference in Paris.

The challenges of our time cannot be wished away. The opportunities of our interconnected world will not simply fall into our laps. The future we seek, as always, must be earned. For more than two centuries, our two peoples have stood together for our mutual freedom. Now we are meeting our responsibilities not just to each other — but to a world that is more secure because our enduring alliance is being made new again.

Related article:

[U.S. Officials on French President Hollande's Visit](#)

4. Moroccan and U.S. Navy Ships Exercise Together (02-10-2014)

Washington — The U.S. Navy frigate USS Elrod and the Royal Moroccan Navy corvette Allal Ben Abellah conducted a series of drills at sea February 6.

The drills, called a passing exercise, were conducted to increase the tactical proficiency, partnership and operational readiness of the two navies, the U.S. Navy said in a February 7 press release.

The crews from each ship were given an opportunity to perform ship maneuvering, respond to a simulated man overboard and conduct a simulated boarding.

The boarding exercise was the most in-depth part of the exchange, as both ships' teams boarded each other's vessels and shared best practices, the Navy said.

"They boarded our ship as if we were a shipping vessel, searched each of the crew members, and searched certain areas of the ship that were designated to be a part of the scenario, and apprehended

the suspects when they found contraband,” said Seaman Jacob Genovese, a member of the Elrod’s boarding team. “The entire time we watched from a distance and compared all of our techniques. Afterwards, we went to their ship and did the same.”

“Exercises like this are important, because in a world where so much deals with and depends on technology and weaponry, ship boarding is one of the few warfare areas that still relies on only people executing each of their jobs to perfection,” said Ensign Kainoa Cumpston, a boarding team officer aboard the Elrod. “It’s a very in-depth warfare area, and it’s something that needs to be constantly trained for.”

Cumpston said he was impressed with how the Moroccan team members executed their mission.

“It was a great opportunity to work with the Royal Moroccan Navy,” Cumpston said. “We have a very experienced boarding team on board, so we had a lot to share. They were a very professional team, and I feel like we all learned something.”

5. [Hagel, Foreign Minister Discuss U.S.-Japan Alliance \(02-08-2014\)](#)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8, 2014 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida met at the Pentagon yesterday to discuss ways to deepen and enhance bilateral cooperation, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby said.

In a statement summarizing the meeting, Kirby said Hagel expressed appreciation for the Japanese government's efforts in moving forward on the replacement facility for Marine Corps Air Station Futenma at Camp Schwab-Henoko Bay on the island of Okinawa.

“The two nations are committed to working together to reduce the impact of training on Okinawans,” he added.

Hagel also endorsed a forward-looking revision of the 1997 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation to enable Japan to play a more active role in promoting regional peace and stability, the press secretary said.

“Secretary Hagel said the United States would continue to cooperate closely with Japan on strengthening and broadening the alliance to meet the security challenges of the 21st century,” Kirby said.

Biographies:

[Chuck Hagel](#)

Related Articles:

[Officials Praise Decision on Futenma Facility](#)

[Hagel Welcomes Approval of Futenma Landfill Permit](#)

6. U.S. Continues to Plan for Post-2014 Afghan Mission, Hagel Says (02-07-2014)

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 7, 2014 – The United States continues to plan for a post-2014 training and assistance mission in Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said today, despite the fact that Afghan President Hamid Karzai continues to delay the signing of an agreement that would allow for the new mission.

Hagel and senior commanders met with President Barack Obama at the White House on Feb. 4 and discussed the retrograde of forces and equipment from Afghanistan, as well as all the other dimensions of the effort in the country, Hagel said at a Pentagon news conference.

“It was an honest exchange between his commanders and himself about the future,” the secretary added.

The U.S. position has not changed, he said. U.S. officials continue to encourage Karzai to sign the bilateral security agreement that he negotiated with the United States last year. A national council that Karzai convened overwhelmingly approved the agreement in November, and the vast majority of Afghans are said to favor its adoption. Yet, Karzai has so far refused to sign the pact, saying he will not do so until after April’s presidential elections.

“We continue to hope and believe that it will be signed,” Hagel said. “We will continue to plan and work with our NATO and International Security Assistance Force commanders for a post-2014 mission.”

That mission is to train, assist and advise Afghan forces and to conduct counterterrorism operations as needed.

Afghan forces are in the lead throughout the country, Hagel said, but they still have some shortcomings – notably in logistics and intelligence and reconnaissance. Building institutions at the top of the military is absolutely crucial to this effort, he added.

“Remember, 12 years ago, there weren’t any institutions at all in Afghanistan,” he said, noting that the U.S. military helps partners around the world with institution-building. “And the goal is a continuation of investing and helping them invest in their own future, in their own institutions, to give them the capability.”

Biographies:
[Chuck Hagel](#)

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[Afghanistan Counternarcotics Efforts Continue, Official Says](#)
[Official Urges Support for Afghan Counternarcotics Efforts](#)

7. Kerry Encourages Faith-Based Efforts for Middle East Peace (02-06-2014)

This blog post by Liora Danan was originally published on the State Department website on January 31. Danan serves in the State Department's Office of Faith Based Community Initiatives.

Secretary Kerry Encourages Faith-Based Efforts to Support Middle East Peace

By Liora Danan

“Humanity once shared an ark, why not again?”

With that question, Imam Yahya Hendi this week encouraged a room of senior Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders to consider their shared responsibility to support Middle East peace. He was joined in opening prayer by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, who asked for a “blessing in a special way on John Kerry and all those who work together with him for their tireless efforts in seeking peace and harmony,” and Rabbi Sharon Brous, who offered a prayer to “bless our leaders with continued dedication — despite opposition and cynicism — and bless us with a hunger for peace.”

Those blessings set the tone for a small, off-the-record luncheon with Secretary of State John Kerry on January 28. The gathering, hosted by Georgetown University, was a rare opportunity for the secretary to meet with prominent American religious leaders to discuss one of his top foreign policy priorities; hear the leaders’ perspectives and concerns; and encourage interfaith or other faith-based efforts to support peace in the region.

The event was coordinated with State Department’s Office of the Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations, the White House Office of Public Engagement, and my office, the new Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives launched by Secretary Kerry last summer. Our involvement with the Georgetown event is a great example of the type of work this office hopes to continue, engaging religious leaders and communities in the foreign policy process, to help further conflict mitigation, human rights and development goals.

Following on the prayers of the three clergy, Secretary Kerry spoke, emphasizing the deep importance of shared Abrahamic values as a foundation for peace. He gave an update on current U.S. government efforts related to the negotiations, focusing on the temporary window of opportunity for making peace, and the leadership that both sides have demonstrated in taking courageous steps toward progress. The secretary said that he is pursuing a two-state solution now because the alternative is worse, arguing that a one-state solution is not feasible conceptually or politically. He also underscored the ways in which the current approach is different than past efforts, and how a framework for negotiations would outline a concrete vision of what peace will look like and how each side can get there.

After a Q&A session with the secretary, the group continued its conversation with government officials leading this effort. The event participants quickly turned to practical ideas for follow-up action, including interfaith working group sessions with the State Department and focused interfaith delegations to the region. We welcome ideas from you as well.

8. Ambassador Power at U.N. on Syria (02-06-2014)

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, At a Security Council Stakeout on Syria, February 6, 2014 New York, N.Y.

Ambassador Power: So as you know, we just received a useful briefing from Special Coordinator Kaag. Ms. Kaag confirmed what has become increasingly clear: the Assad regime has fallen behind in complying with its international obligations to remove chemical agents and precursor chemicals from its soil. The Secretary General himself has affirmed that new equipment is not needed and that the Assad regime has the capability of eliminating the weapons stockpile.

So let me be clear: the Assad regime must immediately take the necessary steps to fulfill its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118. We know the regime has the ability to move these weapons and materials because they have moved them multiple times over the course of this conflict. It is time for the Assad government to stop its foot-dragging, establish a transportation plan, and stick to it. We urge all member-states with influence over the regime to persuade it to move forward with the transportation phase.

The rest of the international community is ready -- and has been ready -- to do its part. Denmark and Norway have had ships waiting off the coast of Syria since early January. Italy has readied its transloading facilities. And the U.S. ship, the CAPE RAY, will soon arrive in the Mediterranean. By delaying, the Assad regime is only increasing the costs to nations that have made donations for shipping, escorts, and other services related to the removal effort. But it also encouraging heightened risks that these weapons will be used again, by regime elements, or will fall into the hands of terrorists.

Even as we seek to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, the international community must continue to work against the daily horror and violence convulsing the country. Despite the Security Council's October 5th presidential statement directing the Syrian government to facilitate humanitarian access, UN relief agencies and international NGOs are telling the world that they are largely unable to reach the 9.3 million Syrians in desperate need of assistance. This is not an "all parties" problem: the principal source of obstruction is the Syrian regime.

For too long, the Syrian government has combined indiscriminate violence -- most recently through the daily use of barrel bombs in Aleppo -- with a deliberate strategy of starvation and denial of medical supplies. President Assad's utter disregard -- almost contempt -- for the welfare of his country's people is glaringly obvious, and the need for a political solution to the crisis could not be more urgent. This Council must actively support the principle that all barriers preventing humanitarian access to all parts of the country and all civilians be removed immediately, as this Council urged with one voice in its October presidential statement. The United States will continue working towards that end.

And with that, I'd like to answer a couple of your questions.

Reporter: Can I ask you about the announcement that the UN has just made about a humanitarian agreement -- nothing's gone in or come out yet, but -- in the old city of Homs?

Ambassador Power: Well, I think you put your finger on the most important feature of that agreement: nothing has gone in or out, yet. I note regime statements this morning describing a willingness to evacuate "innocents." Given that the regime, up to this point, has described just about anybody living in opposition territory as a terrorist -- and has attacked them as such -- you know, we have reason on the basis of history to be very skeptical and, frankly, very concerned about anybody who falls into regime hands who comes from a part of the country that has been under opposition

control. We would note that in Mouadimiya, where an evacuation was undertaken not long ago – several weeks ago – there are still men who were evacuated as part of that official evacuation who, in our view anyway, have not been heard from since. And we would have grave concerns, and would encourage anybody associated with this evacuation, to make sure that they are able to ascertain the welfare of anybody who comes out trusting the terms of such an agreement.

If I could just continue on this – I would also note that the old city of Homs, which has been under siege for well over a year, where the conditions are completely deplorable and utterly heartbreaking, is just one of the besieged areas that we've been raising with the regime. Our understanding is there are about 2,500 people in the old city of Homs. Maybe five to six hundred are being described as covered by this new deal. 250,000 people living across the country in besieged areas, in similar conditions, with no access to food, no access to medicine, no fuel. It's an outrage. And while, again, any progress, when any single life is improved, when any single individual is able to depart conditions like that or get access to food, that's better than the alternative. But I think we should not lose sight of the full picture here.

In addition to the 250,000 in besieged areas, you have more than 2 million people who are in, so-called "hard to reach areas." In some cases, they've been reached once, in a year – and that's considered "hard to reach" rather than "besieged." So, the humanitarian context here is deplorable, and what the presidential statement has made very explicit is that all besieged areas need to be accessed; the barriers must be lifted across the board; and regime obstruction to starving people – and the regime use of starvation as a weapon of war – has got to stop.

Reporter: Thank you, ambassador. As Ambassador Churkin said yesterday, that the American vessel is not ready to be in the spot or do the job to destroy the chemical weapons. When is the American vessel will be ready? And two, are you still working on a draft resolution on the humanitarian problem in Syria? Are you going to circulate the draft any time soon?

Ambassador Power: Well, as I mentioned, our vessel is on its way to the Mediterranean and is going to be in a position to destroy chemical weapons. And just to correct the record, the arrival of the American vessel has nothing to do with the problem that we're seeing on chemical weapons. The problem on chemical weapons is that the Syrian regime, although it has the resources and has everything it needs – as the Secretary General has said and has Sigrid Kaag, I think, has repeated here today – has foot-dragged, and is not moving forward in the way that the Security Council and the OPCW laid out that it should move forward.

So, the issue here is not about an American vessel. The issue is about Syrian foot-dragging. And we and our partners who have contributed resources to this effort are going to be positioned to destroy Priority 1 and Priority 2 chemicals as soon as they exit Syria, which they should have done already.

And on your second question, as I've described in giving even just a small taste of the deplorable conditions on the ground in Syria, which all of you are very familiar with, it is critical that the Security Council move forward in order to signal to the regime that humanitarian access is not optional, that it is required. And we are looking at a range of options. We do support a humanitarian resolution, as do most member-states of the United Nations, and we're hopeful that something like that can be achieved.

Again, we had hoped that the presidential statement, which, you know, has the force of speaking on behalf of the Security Council, that that would have had some impact on regime behavior. That's certainly what Valerie Amos and others, I think, had hoped as well. But if you look at their track record between October and where we are now – the beginning of February – there has been almost no improvement, almost no progress.

Thank you.